

Retired Army nurse makes history, shares experience with USU

By JOSN Kory Kepner
USU University Affairs

Students and faculty at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) have learned a great deal about what it was like to be a minority in the military during the middle of the century thanks to a speech by retired Col. Margaret E. Bailey April 4.

Col. Bailey, the first black nurse promoted to the rank of colonel in the Army, spoke of her experiences coming up through the ranks.

Even though many of her experiences in the Army were tough, she manages to look back at them with a smile and a sense of humor.

“...there was this one soldier who told me I reminded him of his maid...all I could think to respond was he must have had one beautiful maid.”

She had to pause frequently during her speech in order to allow the audience time to quit laughing or allow for the applause to settle down. When her speech was over the audience gave her a standing ovation.

Col. Bailey had not given a presentation in years and Latasha Gatling, a Learning Resource Center assistant archivist, went to her house so she could personally tell her how important it was to everyone at USU her story is.

“I was upstairs looking at some books (in the Learning Resource Center) and I saw that she lived in Silver Spring,” said Ms. Gatling, “her story really intrigued me and I took it from there... I went to her house and we had an hour or two discussion, she was hesitant about coming.”

More than twenty years after joining the Army in June 1944 Col. Bailey became the Army’s first black nurse to be promoted to the rank of colonel. She retired in 1971 and received the Army’s second highest non-combat award, a Legion of Merit medal.

In 1972 the Army appointed her as a consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army to promote increased participation of minorities in recruitment for the Army Nurse Corps.

Ms. Gatling said that Col. Bailey has a great story that needs to be told because the students and people in general, need to know that no matter how hard something may seem you can always get through it.

Col. Bailey’s speech is the first in a series of presentations in the Learning Resource Center’s Heritage Series.

Learning Resource Center Archivist Karen Caron said that Ms. Gatling did a great job and that she is looking forward to the rest of the presentations in the series.



Photo by JOSN Kory Kepner, USN

Patricia Hinton Walker, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N., Dean and Professor, Graduate School of Nursing (right), reminisces about her first meeting with Retired Army Col. Margaret Bailey, the first black nurse to reach the rank of colonel in the Army.